

Unit Three

Vocabulary

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Key Issues to Remember

1. Vocabulary is one of the key elements impacting the ability to communicate but it is not the only element. Fluency comes when students have a complete knowledge of a word and all of its potential uses. For teachers this means that **recycling vocabulary** and **repeated exposures** to words is essential.
2. **Productive** and **receptive** vocabulary are two different things and they have different uses. Our productive vocabulary allows use to speak and write and our receptive vocabulary aids in listening and reading. For most language users, the **receptive vocabulary is much larger** than the productive.
3. There is a difference between the size of a student's vocabulary and the range of the vocabulary. **Vocabulary size** refers to the total number of words known whereas the **vocabulary range** refers to someone's vocabulary knowledge of a specific topic or theme. For example a student with a large vocabulary size may be deficient in the range of their sports vocabulary. This type of imbalance can have negative consequences in certain situations and teachers should work to keep vocabulary range and size in balance.
4. There are **hundreds of thousands of words in English** and, while native speakers may know upwards of 20,000, only around **2,000 are in common use**. For ESL/EFL students this number of 2,000 should be encouraging and for teachers it should help in understanding the value of recycling vocabulary to improve fluency.
5. The good news for second language learners and second language teachers is that **a small number of the words of English occur very frequently** and if a learner knows these words, that learner will know a very large proportion of the words in a written or spoken text. The table below shows vocabulary size and text coverage from a sample of over 500 texts.

| Vocabulary Size | Text Coverage | Vocabulary Size | Text Coverage |
|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|---------------|
| 1000 | 72% | 5000 | 88.7% |
| 2000 | 79.7% | 6000 | 89.9% |
| 3000 | 84% | 15,851 | 97.8% |

It should be clear from this information that a small number of high frequency words are very significant and that the value of teaching new vocabulary decreases as vocabulary size increases. Thus it makes sense to have vocabulary acquisition of new items a high priority in low-level classes and a lower priority in higher level classes.

6. Because there are so many words, learning vocabulary has a strong connection to memory and to our ability to remember words. Teachers should

keep in mind that **all students are unique** in terms of their **memory style** and **learning style**. Teachers need to work hard to vary the types of activities they use to teach vocabulary to help accommodate all learning styles.

7. Learning vocabulary requires that both teachers and student keep track of **word lists** and review them often. The teacher should make a strong effort to keep **daily and weekly word lists** and to remember to recycle the vocabulary as much as possible throughout the class. This recycling can come in short review activities or even bi-weekly or monthly quizzes but it should happen consistently.
8. Learning the vocabulary of a language is a **lifelong process** and students should be an active participant in that process. Make students aware of the value of keeping vocabulary lists and work with them consistently and often on the topic of vocabulary. Students can benefit greatly from a **teacher's consistency** and dedication to vocabulary teaching throughout a year-long course.

Vocabulary: Activities and Approaches in the Classroom

1. Teachers should be as consistent as possible regarding their approach to teaching vocabulary.

This does not mean that teachers need to repeat the same activities over and over again; there are innumerable activities teachers can use to make classes innovative and entertaining. It does mean however, that learning can be enhanced through a consistent approach to vocabulary teaching. Here are some suggestions for ways to make classes more effective:

- Make sure you keep a word list of daily vocabulary words
- Make sure your students are writing the words down
- Review previous lesson's vocabulary at the start of each new lesson
- Always review vocabulary at the end of the lesson
- Make students pronounce the words, it helps them remember
- Give frequent short quizzes to help students remember
- Make sure students are keeping a word list and check it occasionally
- Divide your blackboard or whiteboard into sections and have a space on the board where you ALWAYS write ONLY vocabulary

By focusing on some of these techniques throughout a semester or year-long course, teachers will assist students in building up a large and effective vocabulary that is both productive and receptive.

2. Word lists are valuable because they assist in learning and memory and because they provide clear evidence of the work that is being done in the class.

Both teachers and students often have the experience of walking out of a class and thinking to themselves, “what was just accomplished in there?” Keeping vocabulary lists is one way to deal with this concern. Students should be in the habit of leaving each class with a group of new words fresh in their minds and in their notebooks. The following is a system that teachers can follow for making effective use of word lists in class throughout a course.

- A. At the beginning of each class write some of the vocabulary words from the last class’s word list on the board and review them.
- B. As you are teaching, write each new vocabulary word onto the board in your vocabulary space.
- C. Every ten or fifteen minutes check that students have written down the words in their word list and make sure you write them down too!
- D. At the end of class review the vocabulary words you have collected onto the board, do a choral drill with the students, and check that they have the words written down in their word list.
- E. Every few weeks give a short vocabulary quiz from the word list. This helps keep the words in the students’ minds and helps them remember.
- F. Make sure that vocabulary from the big word list is part of your final exam!

3. Besides teaching vocabulary words, teachers are also responsible for teaching students strategies for remembering the words.

Remember that everyone’s memory is a little different and the techniques for remembering words that work for some people will not necessarily work for others.

Is your learning style visual or auditory? Are you a creative or analytic learner? Everyone is a little different and because of this teachers need to work on a variety of techniques for helping students to remember new words. Some techniques that are commonly used to aid in student memory are listed here.

- A. Repetition: Students write or say the word 5, 10, or 20 times repeatedly
- B. Context: Students put the word into a sentence to give context to its meaning
- C. Pictures: Students draw pictures that remind them of the vocabulary item
- D. Gestures: The teacher acts out or mimes the vocabulary item
- E. Choral Work: The teacher says the word and the class repeats

- F. **Grouping:** Students collect new vocabulary word into similar groups (Ex. Clothes: shirts, socks, gloves, etc.)

Regardless of the techniques chosen by the instructor, we should remember what linguists and cognitive psychologists tell us: students need frequent and consistent exposure to a new word in a variety of situation and contexts in order for it to become an effective part of their productive vocabulary.

4. 12 simple and effective activities for practicing, previewing and reviewing vocabulary in class

Vocabulary is important and teachers need to work hard to make learning new words as entertaining as possible. The following list of activities can be used effectively with most levels of students and in a variety of teaching situations. Teachers should feel free to experiment and come up with some of their own activities but this list will help get teachers started.

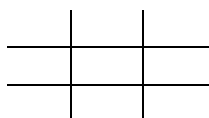
1. Mnemonics: Mnemonics is the name of a memory technique. In this activity the teacher explains new vocabulary items by connecting the sound of the word to a similar sounding word in the students' first language. For example the German word *raupe* (English caterpillar) sounds very similar to the English *rope* and it could be taught by giving students the mental image of a caterpillar stretched out like a rope.

2. Word Jumbles: Rearrange the letters of words and have students put them back into the correct order to form words. Example LUARBACYVO = VOCABULARY!

3. Hangman: An activity where students have to guess letters to a mystery word that you have chosen. Put blank spaces equaling the number of letters of a word onto the board (Example BOARD = _ _ _ _ _) and then ask students to guess letters. Correct letters are written into the correct blank and incorrect guesses are written off to the side

4. Pictionary: Divide the class into teams and give a student a word written on a card. Ask the student to draw the word on the board. If his team guesses the word, they get a point. Do not allow the student drawing to speak or use gestures, this will make it more fun!

5. Tic-Tac-Toe: A simple activity with X's and O's where students have to use vocabulary words and form correct sentences from the words.



Put a vocabulary item into each box and tell students that in order to make their X or O they must first create a correct sentence or definition with the word.

6. Word Search: An activity where the teacher hides vocabulary words in a long list of letters and students have to find them.

| | | | | |
|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| <u>W</u> | B | R | E | X |
| O | <u>O</u> | P | I | D |
| E | W | <u>R</u> | A | S |
| C | C | V | <u>D</u> | L |
| A | L | Z | F | <u>S</u> |

7. Storytelling: Write some vocabulary words on the board and ask students to tell a story using the words correctly. This is best done as a pair or small group activity.

8. Scrabble: Give the class a group of seven letters and ask them to create as many words as possible from the letters. Make it a competitive group activity and develop a point system so longer words are more valuable. This works particularly well for teaching prefixes and suffixes.

9. Synonym/Antonym dictation: If you have a word list to review, divide the class into groups and quickly read 5-10 words that are synonyms or antonyms to the words on the list. The group must remember or write the words that you read then connect them to their synonyms or antonyms; the fastest group wins.

10. Parts of Speech Review: Print the words NOUN, VERB, ADVERB, ADJECTIVE, OTHER onto the board. Have students/groups classify all the words on their word list into the appropriate category.

11. Dictionary Work: Ask students to work with either a bilingual or monolingual dictionary to define a list of new words. Do this as a competitive activity with small groups working against one another.

12. Word Webs: Put a vocabulary word on the board and ask the class to come up with as many words as they can that they associate with the word. Write these words in a large “web” or circle around the original word. This type of association activity helps students categorize new words effectively.

Handouts for Class

Sample vocabulary tests

Instructions: These simple tests can be used by both high level (10,000 word list) and low level (2,000 word list) second language learners to estimate vocabulary size. After you finish then determine the percentage you have correct and then take that percent of the word list number. For example if you score 10 out of 15 on the 10,000 word list then that is 66% so your approximate vocabulary size is 6,600 words!

Sample Vocabulary Test: 10,000 Word List

1. The baby is wet. Her **dia**_____ needs changing.
2. Second year university students in the US are called **soph**_____.
3. The **dea**_____ helped with the care of the poor at the parish.
4. The hurricane **whi**_____ along the coast.
5. Some coal was still **smo**_____ among the ashes.
6. She was sitting on the balcony and **bas**_____ in the sun.
7. Computers have made typewriters old-fashioned and **obs**_____.
8. If your lips are sore, try lip **sal**_____ not medicine.
9. The actors exchanged **ban**_____ with the reporters.
10. The dog **crin**_____ when it saw the snake.
11. Anyone found **loo**_____ bombed houses and shops will be punished.
12. The problem is beginning to assume **mam**_____ proportions.
13. The rescue attempt could not proceed. It was **imp**_____ by bad weather.
14. The wounded man **squ**_____ on the floor in agony.
15. A **thr**_____ controls the flow of gas into an engine.

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Sample Vocabulary Test: 2,000 Word List

1. Plants receive water from the soil through their **ro**_____.
2. The mechanic had to replace the **mo**_____ of the car.
3. They sat down to eat even though they were not **hu**_____.
4. She **wan**_____ aimlessly in the streets.
5. There is **co**_____ of the original report in the file.
6. The doctor **ex**_____ the patient thoroughly.
7. The railway **con**_____ London with its suburbs.

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Further Resources

For Students

1. Vocaboly – Practice Tests

<http://www.vocaboly.com/vocabulary-test/>

A long list of practice vocabulary tests for TOEFL, GMAT, GRE and SAT tests.

2. Forum Education – Practice Test

http://www.forumeducation.net/servlet/pages/vi/show/static_vocabulary2.html

A comprehensive vocabulary test from Forum Education On-line.

3. More Practice Tests

http://www.insightin.com/test/take_test.phtml Another on-line vocabulary exam that can be used to estimate vocabulary size and range

For Teachers

4. Lextutor

<http://www.lex tutor.ca/>

A comprehensive website with word lists, vocabulary tests and research articles on teaching vocabulary.

5. World Wide Words

<http://www.worldwidewords.org/index.htm>

A website designed for word lovers with lots of word lists and links to other sources of information.

6. Academic Study

<http://www1.harenet.ne.jp/%7Ewaring/papers/cup.html>

A link to an academic article on vocabulary size by Paul Nation, one of the leading researchers on vocabulary knowledge in ESL and EFL.

7. More Academic Study

<http://www1.harenet.ne.jp/%7Ewaring/papers/papers.html>

An excellent and comprehensive list of links to academic articles on vocabulary in ESL and EFL.